

Southern Maryland Transportation Needs Assessment

DRAFT Existing Conditions Technical Memorandum Summary Report

Introduction:

The Existing Conditions Technical Memorandum Summary Report (Report) provides stakeholders with an understanding of how conditions in the region are influencing the transportation system. The Report lays out the geographic, demographic, and economic context that drives demand for transportation in Southern Maryland and describes the current state of the regional transportation system.

Context:

Geography, Population, Economy

The geography of Southern Maryland limits its connections to the rest of Maryland and, by extension, to the U.S. transportation network. Three major highways (MD 210, US 301/MD 5, and MD 4) connect the region to the north, but only US 301 connects the region to the south to King George County, Virginia. Two bridges across the Patuxent River link Calvert County with Charles and St. Mary's Counties. This unique geography influences regional development patterns, which in turn impact the region's demographic and economic trends.

Of the three counties of Southern Maryland, Charles County is the most populous with 138,050 residents in 2005. St. Mary's and Calvert Counties have similar-sized populations with 96,100 and 87,500 residents respectively. Southern Maryland's population grew from 167,000 in 1980 to 322,000 in 2005, an increase of 2.6 percent per year and over twice as fast as Maryland's population growth. By 2030, the population of Southern Maryland is projected to increase by 44 percent from 322,000 in 2005 to 462,000 in 2030. Though the forecasted average annual growth rate between 2005 and 2030 is lower than that experienced between 1980 and 2005, the region is still expected to grow more than twice as fast as the State as a whole.

Land Use

Forest and agricultural land uses comprise over 75 percent of the total land cover in Southern Maryland, with major development concentrated along several highways including US 301, MD 5, MD 235, and MD 2/4. Activity centers, or locations of focused development, such as population concentrations, major employers, and commercial districts, have been identified in all three counties. Understanding the location of these activity centers is critical to understanding the transportation needs of the region. Comprehensive planning efforts, including the priority funding area process and the protection of rural legacy areas, will guide future development in Southern Maryland. In turn, these planning efforts will impact future transportation needs.

Transportation and Travel Trends

Commuting times in Southern Maryland are among the highest in the nation. In 2000, the average travel time to work in Southern Maryland was just over 35 minutes compared to a Maryland statewide average of 30 minutes and a U.S. average of 25 minutes. Over three quarters of work trips in Southern Maryland are made in personal vehicles. Carpooling accounts for 13 percent of trips and public transportation accounts for one percent of work trips. About five percent of people in the region work at home. Walking, biking, or other methods account for approximately three percent of travel. A slightly larger proportion of Southern Maryland commuters drive alone compared to the rest of the nation and a lower proportion use public transportation than for the nation as a whole. In addition, a somewhat higher percentage of workers in Southern Maryland work at home compared to the national percentage.

More Southern Maryland residents are employed than there are job positions in Southern Maryland. This results in a net outflow of commuters in the morning and a net inflow of commuters in the evening. Variations in commuting patterns among the jurisdictions of Southern Maryland are evident, with over 60 percent of Charles County and Calvert County workers commuting out of their home county compared to just 35 percent of St. Mary's County workers who do so. Prince George's County and Washington, DC are the two primary destinations for Southern Maryland commuters.

Transportation System:

Highway System

Southern Maryland has 2,351 miles of roadway, of which 1,591 miles are classified as rural and 760 as urban. In 2006, there were 2.9 billion annual vehicle miles of travel (VMT) on Southern Maryland roadways. The expressway and principal arterial system in Southern Maryland comprise just over 6 percent of the total roadway system mileage, but carry over 53 percent of all traffic. By contrast, the region's collectors and local roads comprise about 88 percent of miles, but carry only 31 percent of traffic. There are three well known bridges in Southern Maryland, as well as numerous smaller, less well-known structures. The three key bridges are the Harry W. Nice Memorial Bridge, the Thomas Johnson Memorial Bridge, and the Benedict Bridge.

Public Transportation System

There currently are five key providers of transit service to Southern Maryland: MTA (8 routes), WMATA (1 route), Charles County VanGO (10 routes), Calvert County Transit (6 routes), and St. Mary's SMS (9 routes). MTA provides commuter bus service between various park-and-ride lots and destinations within Washington, DC and Prince George's County. WMATA currently operates one route in the tri-county area, from Indian Head in Charles County to the Southern Avenue Metrorail station in Prince George's County. The three County services provide local service within their respective counties, with the exception of VanGO. (VanGO has a route that connects with an SMS route in St. Mary's County.)

Bicycle and Pedestrian System

Existing bicycle conditions in the Southern Maryland region are variable, ranging from excellent conditions on some rural roadways to poor conditions on congested and high-speed roadways. There are a few short off-road trails in Southern Maryland and some off-road trails for general use in residential communities.

Rail System

There is no existing commuter rail service in Southern Maryland, but two operating freight lines are present. CSX Transportation Inc. (CSXT) operates a line that roughly parallels US 301 from the Mirant Power Plant in Morgantown through Charles County and into Prince George's County. The other rail line in Southern Maryland is owned by the United States Government and extends from Indian Head to the CSXT line between La Plata and Waldorf.

Air Facilities

There is no commercial aviation service in Southern Maryland. The closest commercial airports are the Baltimore/Washington Thurgood Marshall International (BWI) Airport near Baltimore, Maryland and the Ronald Reagan National Airport near Washington, DC. The inventory of airports in Southern Maryland consists primarily of private and military airports and heliports. Air travel from these airports is primarily recreational, although charter service is available at some. Plans are in place to improve the facilities at the Maryland Airport at Pomomkey to handle corporate jets and to extend the runway at the Capt. Walter Francis Duke Regional Airport at California to enable commuter service.